

**DIGITAL-TO-ANALOG CONVERTER WITH A SHIFTED OUTPUT AND AN
INCREASED RANGE**

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Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to digital-to-analog converters, and, in particular, to a low power digital-to-analog converter with a shifted output and an increased range to improve the system dynamic range.

Background of the Invention

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A digital-to-analog converter (DAC) is configured to convert a digital signal into an analog voltage. One type of DAC comprises a tapped set of resistors, wherein one of the tap points is coupled to an op-amp at a summing junction. In this type of DAC, the output voltage is proportional to the voltage of the selected tap point. Several other kinds of DACs are known in the art, such as: R-2R ladders, current-switched DACs, and pulse width modulation DACs.

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Brief Description of the Drawings

Non-limiting and non-exhaustive embodiments of the present invention are described with reference to the following drawings.

FIG. 1 is an illustration of an example embodiment of a circuit for digital-to-analog conversion that is arranged in accordance with aspects of the present invention.

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FIG. 2 is an illustration of an example embodiment of a digital-to-analog converter circuit that is arranged in accordance with aspects of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is an illustration of an example embodiment of an operational transconductance amplifier circuit that is configured for operation in the digital-to-analog converter circuit.

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FIG. 4 is an illustration of an example embodiment of a current digital-to-analog converter circuit that is configured for operation in the digital-to-analog converter circuit.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

Throughout the specification and claims, the following terms take the meanings explicitly associated herein, unless the context clearly dictates otherwise. The meanings identified below are not intended to limit the terms, but merely provide illustrative examples for the terms. The meaning of "a," "an," and "the" includes plural reference, the meaning of "in" includes "in" and "on." The term "connected" means a direct electrical connection between the items connected, without any intermediate devices. The term "coupled" means either a direct electrical connection between the items connected, or an indirect connection through one or more passive or active intermediary devices. The term "circuit" means either a single component or a multiplicity of components, either active and/or passive, that are coupled together to provide a desired function. The term "signal" means at least one current, voltage, charge, temperature, data, or other signal. Referring to the drawings, like numbers indicate like parts throughout the views.

Briefly stated, the invention is related to a DAC circuit. The DAC circuit comprises a current DAC, first and second resistance circuits, and an operational transconductance amplifier (OTA). The first resistance circuit is coupled between a first node and an output of the OTA. The second resistance circuit is coupled between the first node and a power supply node. The current DAC is arranged to provide an analog current to a first node in response to a digital input signal. The OTA has a first input that receives a stable DC reference voltage signal, and a second input that is coupled to the first node. A charge pump provides the local supply voltage of the OTA to improve the system dynamic. The output voltage corresponds to the sum of the voltages across the first and second resistance circuits. An increase in the current produced by the current DAC causes a decrease in the output voltage.

FIG. 1 is an illustration of an example embodiment of a circuit (100) for digital-to-analog conversion that is arranged in accordance with aspects of the present invention. Circuit 100 includes a charge pump circuit (102), and DAC circuit (104), and a capacitive load (C_{out}). Charge pump circuit 102 is coupled to node N110 and node N112. DAC circuit 104 has a first input that is coupled to node N116, a second

input that is coupled to node N118, a third input that is coupled to node N114, a fourth input that is coupled to node N110, a fifth input that is coupled to node N112, and an output that is coupled to node N120. Capacitive load C_{out} is coupled between nodes N120 and N112.

5 Circuit 100 is configured to operate as follows below. A first supply signal (V_{SS}) is applied at node N112 and a second supply signal (V_{DD}) is applied at node N110. Charge pump circuit 102 is configured to provide a signal (V_{HI}) at node N114 in response to signals V_{DD} and V_{SS} . The voltage associated with signal V_{HI} is higher, relative to signal V_{SS} , than the voltage associated with signal V_{DD} .

10 DAC circuit 104 is configured to provide an output voltage (V_{out}) at node N120 in response a digital input control signal (CTL) at node N116, a reference signal (V_{ref}) at node N118, and signal V_{HI} . Capacitive load C_{out} is a purely capacitive load. Therefore, there is approximately no DC load current. DAC circuit 104 is configured such that the upper output voltage range is greater than the voltage
15 associated with signal V_{DD} , relative to V_{SS} . According to one example, the voltage associated with V_{SS} is 0V, the voltage associated with V_{DD} is 3.3 V, the voltage associated with V_{ref} is 1V, and the output voltage range of DAC circuit 104 corresponds to 1V-3.5V. In another example, the voltage associated with signal V_{ref} corresponds to a bandgap voltage of approximately 1.2V.

20 According to one example, circuit 100 may be arranged for a CMOS imager application. In this example, DAC circuit 104 is configured to pull the reset level of the pixels to a level that is higher than the supply level such that the pixels have an extended dynamic range. In this example, capacitive load C_{out} corresponds to approximately the sum of the gate capacitances that are associated with each reset
25 transistor in a row of reset transistors and a metal parasitic capacitance. Alternatively, circuit 100 may be used for other applications.

FIG. 2 is an illustration of an example embodiment of the DAC circuit (104), arranged in accordance with aspects of the present invention. DAC circuit 104 includes an OTA circuit (202), resistance circuits (R_1 , R_2) and a current DAC (204).
30 OTA 102 has a first input that is coupled to node N118, a second input that is coupled

to node N210, and an output that is coupled to node N120. Resistance circuit R1 is coupled between node N210 and node N112. Resistance circuit R2 is coupled between node N120 and node N210. Current DAC 204 is coupled between node N110 and node N210, and has a control port that is coupled to node N116.

5 DAC circuit 104 is configured to operate as follows below. OTA circuit 202 is configured to provide a current (I_{OTA}) to node N120 in response to a comparison between signal Vref and a signal at node N210 (V_{SNS}). Signal V_{SNS} is response to the output voltage (V_{out}) at node N210. OTA circuit 202 is arranged to operate in a negative feedback loop such that the voltage associated with signal V_{SNS} is approximately equal to the voltage associated with signal Vref. The voltage drop across resistance circuit R1 is approximately Vref, such that the current through resistance circuit R1 (I_{R1}) is approximately given by $I_{R1}=V_{ref}/R1$. Signal V_{HI} operates as a local power supply for OTA 202 such that the output voltage range for V_{out} is extended above V_{DD} .

15 Current DAC 204 is configured to provide a current (I_{DAC}) to node N210 in response to a digital input signal (CTL). Current I_{R1} approximately corresponds to $I_{ref}/R1$, such that the current through resistance circuit R2 (I_{R2}) is approximately given by $I_{R2}=V_{ref}/R1-I_{DAC}$. Accordingly, the output voltage (V_{out}) is approximately given by $V_{out}= [(V_{ref}/R1)-I_{DAC}] * R2 + V_{ref}$, or $V_{out}=V_{ref} * [1+(R2/R1)]-R2*I_{DAC}$. V_{out} is at a maximum value when I_{DAC} is zero. V_{out} decreases as I_{DAC} increases while current flows through resistance circuit R2 and OTA 202 is in closed loop operation.

20 The current (I_{DAC}) that is provided by current DAC 104 is sourced from V_{DD} . The current (I_{OTA}) that is provided by OTA 202 is sourced from V_{HI} . DAC circuit 104 is arranged to minimize the current that is sourced from V_{HI} such that power is conserved.

25 According to one specific embodiment of DAC circuit 104, $R2/R1$ is selected to equal 2.5, Vref is selected to equal 1V, and signal CTL corresponds to a six-bit digital control code. In this embodiment, V_{out} corresponds to approximately 3.5V when signal CTL corresponds to 000000, and V_{out} corresponds to approximately 1.0V when signal CTL corresponds to 111111, where I_{DAC} is the same as I_{R1} .

FIG. 3 is an illustration of an example embodiment of an OTA circuit (202) that is configured for operation in DAC circuit 104. OTA circuit 202 includes transistors (M1-M9), current sources (I1-I3) and a resistance circuit (R3). Transistor M1 has a gate that is coupled to node N118, a source that is coupled to node N322, and a drain that is coupled to node N326. Transistor M2 has a gate that is coupled to node N210, a source that is coupled to node N322, and a drain that is coupled to node N324.

Transistor M3 has a gate that is coupled to node N320, a drain that is coupled to node N320, and a source that is coupled to node N322. Transistor M4 has a gate that is coupled to node N320, a drain that is coupled to node N328, and a source that is coupled to node N326. Transistor M5 has a gate that is coupled to node N320, a drain that is coupled to node N120, and a source that is coupled to node N324. Transistor M6 has a gate that is coupled to node N328, a drain that is coupled to node N330, and a source that is coupled to node N332. Transistor M7 has a gate that is coupled to node N328, a drain that is coupled to node N120, and a source that is coupled to node N334. Transistor M8 has a gate that is coupled to node N330, a drain that is coupled to node N332, and a source that is coupled to node N114. Transistor M9 has a gate that is coupled to node N330, a drain that is coupled to node N334, and a source that is coupled to node N114.

Current source I1 is coupled between node N322 and node N112. Current source I2 is coupled between node N322 and node N112. Current source I3 is coupled between node N110 and node N320. Resistance circuit R3 is coupled between node N330 and node N328.

OTA circuit 202 is configured to operate as follows. A first supply signal (V_{SS}) is applied at node N112, and a second supply signal (V_{DD}) is applied at node N110. Signal V_{HI} is applied at node N114. Signal V_{ref} is received at node N118, and signal V_{SNS} is received at node N210.

Transistors M1 and M2 are configured to operate as a differential pair. Transistor M4 is configured to operate as a cascode transistor in cooperation with transistor M1. Transistor M5 is configured to operate as a cascode transistor in cooperation with transistor M2. Transistors M8 and M9 are arranged to operate as a

current mirror load. Transistor M6 is configured to operate as a cascode transistor in cooperation with transistor M8. Transistor M7 is configured to operate as a cascode transistor in cooperation with transistor M9. Current source circuit I1 is configured to provide a tail current to OTA 204.

5 Resistance circuit R3 is arranged to bias cascode transistors M6 and M7. The current through resistance circuit R3 (I_{R3}) is approximately given by $I1/2$, such that the voltage between nodes N328 and N330 is approximately given by $R3*(I1/2)$. The voltage at node N332 is approximately equal to $V_{HI}-V_{GS}$, where V_{GS} is the gate-to-source voltage of transistor M8 (or M9). The voltage at node N328 is approximately
10 given by $V_{HI}-V_{GS}-R3*(I1/2)$. The resistance of resistance circuit R3 is selected to provide an appropriate bias voltage to cascode transistors M6 and M7.

 Transistor M3, current source I2, and current source I3 are arranged in cooperation to bias cascode transistors M4 and M5. Transistors M1 and M3 have a common source at node N332. Transistor M3 is configured such that the V_{GS} of
15 transistor M3 is greater than the V_{GS} of transistor M1. For example, transistor M3 may have a long channel length and a short channel width such that the V_{GS} of transistor M3 is relatively large. Current source I2 and current source I3 are each configured to produce approximately the same current. Current source I3 is arranged to operate such that the current that is provided by current source I3 is sourced from V_{DD} .

20 Many alternative embodiments of OTA circuit 202 are possible. For example, current sources I1 and I2 may combined into one current source. Current source I3 may be replaced with an alternative kind of current-limiting device, such as a resistor. Resistance circuit R3 may be replaced with an alternative circuit that is configured to bias cascode transistors M6 and M7. Transistor M3 may be replaced with
25 an alternative circuit that is configured to bias cascode transistors M4 and M5.

 FIG. 4 is an illustration of an example embodiment of a current digital-to-analog converter circuit (204) that is configured for operation in DAC circuit 104. Circuit 204 includes transistors (M10-M17), a resistance circuit (R4), and an amplifier circuit (AMP1). Amplifier circuit A1 has a noninverting input that is coupled to node
30 N118, an inverting input that is coupled to node N430, a first power supply input that is

coupled to node N114, a second power supply input that is coupled to node N112, and an output that is coupled to node N432. Resistance circuit R4 is coupled between node N430 and node N112. Transistor M10 has a gate that is coupled to node N432, a drain that is coupled to node N434, and a source that is coupled to node N430. Transistor
5 M11 has a gate that is coupled to node N434, a drain that is coupled to node N434, and a source that is coupled to node N114.

Transistor M12 has a gate that is coupled to node N434, a drain that is coupled to node N436, and a source that is coupled to node N114. Transistor M13 has a gate that is coupled to node N434, a drain that is coupled to node N438, and a source
10 that is coupled to node N114. Transistor M14 has a gate that is coupled to node N434, a drain that is coupled to node N440, and a source that is coupled to node N114. Transistor M15 has a gate that is coupled to node N434, a drain that is coupled to node N442, and a source that is coupled to node N114. Transistor M16 has a gate that is coupled to node N434, a drain that is coupled to node N444, and a source that is
15 coupled to node N114. Transistor M17 has a gate that is coupled to node N434, a drain that is coupled to node N446, and a source that is coupled to node N114.

Circuit 204 is configured to operate as follows below. A first supply signal (V_{SS}) is applied at node N112, and a second supply signal (V_{DD}) is applied at node N114. A reference signal (V_{ref}) is applied at node N118, and a control signal
20 (CTL) is applied at node N116 (e.g. digital control signal b0-b5).

Amplifier circuit AMP1 is arranged to operate in a negative feedback loop such that the voltage at node N430 is approximately equal to V_{ref} when steady state conditions are reached. The current through resistance circuit R4 (I_{R4}) is approximately given by $I_{R4}=V_{ref}/R4$. Transistors M11-M17 comprise a current mirror
25 that is arranged to reflect a weighted version of I_{R4} to the drains of transistors M12-M17. For example, transistors M11-M17 may be binary weighted such that transistors M12-M17 provide drain currents of $I_{R4}/64$, $I_{R4}/32$, $I_{R4}/16$, $I_{R4}/8$, $I_{R4}/4$, and $I_{R4}/2$ respectively. The switches (D0-D5) are controlled by the control signal (CTL), which corresponds to a 6-bit digital code in one embodiment. Each bit of signal CTL (b0-b5)
30 controls a respective switch (D0-D5). Each of the weighted currents that are provided

by transistors M11-M17 is coupled to a corresponding switch (D0-D5). Each of the weighted currents that are coupled to an actuated switch is combined at node N210 to provide signal I_{DAC} at node N210.

Resistance circuits R1-R4 may each comprise one or more resistors.

- 5 Alternatively, resistance circuits R1-R4 may each comprise one or more devices that are configured to operate as a resistor (e.g. MOSFETs).

- Since I_{DAC} is proportional to $V_{ref}/R4$, R4 is proportional to R1 and R2. Resistance circuits R1, R2, and R4 comprise matched resistor circuit types such as resistors, FETs biased as resistors, etc. Resistance circuits R1, R2, and R4 further
10 comprise matched materials and matched layout sizes such that variation over process, temperature, and voltage are matched. The matching between R1 and R2 ensures that selected ratios between R1, R2, and R4 are accurate. Only the accuracy of the ratio between R1, R2, and R4 is significant, not the accuracy of the values of the individual resistance circuits.

- 15 The above specification, examples and data provide a complete description of the manufacture and use of the composition of the invention. Since many embodiments of the invention can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention, the invention resides in the claims hereinafter appended.